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John Leo

Tufts evangelicals are punished for acting on their beliefs

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com> -- TUFTS UNIVERSITY in Medford, Mass., is punishing a campus evangelical group for refusing to allow practicing homosexuals into its leadership positions.

A student tribunal, the Tufts Community Union Judiciary, voted to "derecognize" the Tufts Christian Fellowship. This means that the evangelicals will have trouble functioning on campus. They will not be able to reserve rooms for meetings, publicize events in campus listings, or even use bulletin boards. They are forbidden to use the Tufts name, and they will lose their share of student-activity money doled out to all student groups, some \$5,700 a year. One administrator was quoted as telling the group, "I don't mean to get dramatic or anything, but essentially, on the Tufts campus, you do not exist."

At a late-night meeting that the evangelicals were not told about, the judiciary tribunal decided,



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without a hearing, that the fellowship was violating campus antidiscrimination policy by not allowing Julie Catalano, a bisexual member of the group, into a leadership position next year. The fellowship says it knew that Catalano had been "exploring her sexuality" when she joined the group three years ago, but she accepted the group's teaching on homosexuality and apparently had no trouble with it. This spring, however, she revealed she was bisexual and concluded that homosexual practice is compatible with Scripture. She wanted a leadership role next year, but the group said it cannot have a leader who does not share its religious beliefs. The group says it supports Catalano and does not want to expel her. Politically, members say, they favor gay rights and oppose homophobia, but they must remain free to teach their own doctrines. The administration says it is taking no position, that the issue is purely a student matter. But gays have great power on campus and Christians don't, so comments from the acting dean of students, Bruce Reitman, seem to come down against the fellowship. "TCU funding is not the right thing to provide to a group that doesn't make its membership totally open to everyone." In fact, the fellowship has said many times it welcomes all students. The issue isn't sexual orientation but the right to select leaders that support the group's core beliefs.

Meeting not permitted. In framing the issue purely in terms of bias, the Tufts student tribunal glosses over the fact that it is punishing a religious group for failing to have the views of the dominant campus culture. Religious groups have to decide their own beliefs, not buckle under to a campus-approved theology. In effect, the student tribunal is now in the business of pressuring a group to deny its own reading of Scripture. The Tufts Christian Fellowship said: "By requiring that religious groups not even consider their own religious beliefs when making leadership decisions, the Judiciary has effectively silenced the voice of religion on the Tufts campus." The fellowship has appealed the decision, but last week the new policy took hold: the fellowship's 20-member Bible study group at Capen House, an African-American residence, was unable to reserve a room and couldn't meet.


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If this precedent means that no group can deny a leadership position on the basis of beliefs, then scientific groups would have to accept flat-Earth leaders and Hillel would have to accept leaders who say the Holocaust never happened. More immediate, if administrators or courts don't step in to restore sanity, many religious groups across the country will become vulnerable. Catholics, Muslims, Orthodox Jews, black Pentecostals, as well as evangelicals, do not approve of homosexuality.

In 1997, Grinnell College in Iowa became the first campus to penalize an evangelical group for not allowing homosexual leaders. The group has been derecognized and defunded, though it is still allowed to meet and worship on campus. Middlebury College in Vermont is in the midst of a similar controversy. Proposed anti-bias language in the student handbook says that no student may be eliminated from being considered for leadership of any campus group because of beliefs or identity. At Whitman College in Washington State, an evangelical group is under fire because a student bylaw says groups are not allowed to consider one sexual orientation superior to another. In the wake of publicity about Tufts and Middlebury, other colleges will presumably use the same tactics against their campus religious groups.

The broader problem is that the politically correct left now relies far more on coercion than on persuasion or moral appeal. The long-term trend is to depict dissent from the gay agenda as a form of illegitimate and punishable expression. Nick-Anthony Buford, a student at Boalt Hall, the law school of the University of California-Berkeley, thinks more coercion is coming. Writing in *Policy Review*, he says that given existing trends, "an opinion contrary to the majority opinion at Boalt in favor of gay rights might be treated as the equivalent of racist hate speech." Or open debate on the subject "would be treated as creating a hostile work environment." Will the leaders of the gay-rights movement please speak a little more clearly about freedom of speech and freedom of religion? 

JWR contributor John Leo's latest book is [Two Steps Ahead of the Thought Police](#). Send your comments by [clicking here](#).



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